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Reducir la ansiedad y mejorar la motivación en la clase de lengua extranjera inglés con música y escritura creativa: una propuesta para alumnos de PMAR

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Reducing Anxiety and Improving Motivation in EFL Classroom through Music and Creative Writing: A Proposal for PMAR Students

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1. ABSTRACT

Anxiety and lack of motivation represent significant hurdles for the learning process. Adolescents are living a difficult period where anxiety is quite present, and this is particularly true in PMAR students. These students have alredy suffered several academic failures, and this leads to more anxiety, lack of motivation and a more disruptive behaviour in class. Music is a mood regulator used for different purposes, to be more active or more relaxed. Therefore, music, especially relaxing music without lyrics, seems to be a possible tool to reduce anxiety in class. On the other hand, creative writing activities may be found interesting and foster motivation. This proposal seeks to combine music and creative writing in order to reduce anxiety and improve motivation in the EFL classroom in a PMAR group. This combination may create a comfortable environment that could help stay on focus and improve learning outcomes in a challenging group.

Keywords: anxiety, music, creative writing, motivation, adolescents, PMAR

Resumen

La ansiedad y la falta de motivación representan obstáculos significativos para el proceso de aprendizaje. Los adolescentes viven un período complicado, en el que la ansiedad está muy presente, especialmente en alumnos de PMAR. Estos alumnos ya han sufrido varios fracasos académicos, lo que produce mayor ansiedad, menor motivación y conductas más disruptivas. La música es un regulador de emociones que se utiliza para diferentes fines. Por este motivo, la música, especialmente la relajante sin letra, parece una herramienta válida para reducir la ansiedad en el aula. Por otra parte, las actividades de escritura creativa pueden resultar más interesantes y mejorar la motivación. Esta propuesta pretende combinar la música y la escritura creativa para reducir la ansiedad y mejorar la motivación en un grupo de PMAR. Esta combinación puede generar un entorno que puede ayudar a mantener la concentración y a mejorar los resultados de aprendizaje en un grupo complicado.

Palabras clave: ansiedad, música, escritura creative, motivación, adolescentes, PMAR

2. INTRODUCTION

Teachers do not stop searching new methods and techniques in order to improve students learning outcomes. Some of the practices carried out in the current teaching practice would have not been imaginable some decades ago. Thanks to a large number of studies that are and have been carried out and to the fact that the information sharing has experienced a dramatic evolution, teachers have more tools and information then ever before to improve and ease their job. And all these efforts aim at obtaining improvements in the education outcomes, in order to have a well-educated society. Achieving this ultimate goal may bring huge benefits for all, in fact a "well-educated society is a prime potential for new innovation" (Abu-Tair, Lahrech, Al Marri & Abu-Hijleh, 2020, p. 188). And in this hard work for improvement, the class environment has become an element that education professionals are taking into consideration and, therefore, they are increasingly working on it. Today, students are in the centre of the learning process and their motivation and well-being are taken into account more than ever. Therefore, the environment in the classroom has gained relevance as an important factor, even one of the most important (Young, 2014), because "students learn better when they perceive the classroom environment more positively" (Dorman, Aldridge & Fraser, 2006, p. 907). Related to this, we hear quite often that keeping the control of the class remains a problem, maybe the most commented one together with the lack of motivation of students. According to Fenwick "classroom management is one of the most perplexing and difficult aspects of teaching and that it is an important task teachers must learn if they are to be successful in the classroom" (Good & Brophy, 2000, in Dinsmore 2003). Moreover, teachers in first years of profession rated classroom management as their main concern in a survey carried out in 1998 and conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (Dinsmore 2003). This is not strange, as it is estimated that 10-20% of students present a behaviour that complicates the lessons and that is difficult to be managed by teachers (Owens et al., 2020, p. 52). Thus, it seems clear that more tools and resources are needed to be implemented in the classroom. This is especially true when dealing with students that are particularly problematic. In Spain, two groups seem to be the most challenging for teachers: *PMAR* and

Basic Vocational Training. These students have already suffered failures in the regular classes with standard methods and need some help for different reasons. These groups usually show lack of motivation, disruptive behaviour, capacity-related difficulties with a foreign language or other subjects, etc. Taking into consideration this situation, teachers seem to need every available tool to improve these students' motivation and outcomes. This is of paramount importance not only for the teacher's job and well-being in the classroom, but also for these adolescents' life, as their results of today will deeply impact their future lives.

In this proposal, we seek to provide teachers with a new tool to improve class management and learning outcomes: a combination of soft music with creative writing activities. By combining relaxing music with creative writing activities, we may benefit from the advantages of both approaches. On the one hand, soft music may help reduce anxiety in class and make students feel more comfortable. On the other hand, creative writing activities are usually found more interesting and improve motivation. Therefore, carrying out creative writing activities related to a certain type of music may be a valid option to create a comfortable environment for students, even in the most challenging groups, such as PMAR.

This paper is divided into 4 sections. The first section explains what anxiety is and how this affects adolescents and the learning process, according to the current research. In this first section, music and creative writing are also presented as options to reduce anxiety and improve motivation and attention. The second section explains what a PMAR programme is and also gives some information about these students' profile. The third section presents the main objectives of this proposal. And finally, the fourth section aims to explain this proposal in detail, with its contents, methodology and specific activities and assessment methods. With this proposal, the final goal is to offer another tool and other perspectives in order to help students and teachers to improve the environment in the EFL classroom.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. Anxiety in adolescents

Anxiety is a normal part of our lives, and everyone experiences it. There are many moments in life when anxiety and stress play a role, particularly in moments of hard work, when we face dangers or when important decisions must be taken. Problems arise when this anxiety reaches high levels. In fact, in their website, the American Academy of Child and Adolescents Psychiatry indicate that everyone experiences anxiety, being a natural and important emotion. The goal of this emotion is to signal a near danger or a sudden and threatening change, and it does this through stirrings of worry, fearfulness, and alarm. Despite this usefulness, sometimes anxiety becomes an exaggerated, unhealthy response. Thus, an excess of anxiety may be an unhealthy response, and therefore it should be avoided or treated. We should not forget that anxiety moves us to carry out actions through the adrenaline, a hormone that makes us feel more energetic and alert, but an excess may be harmful. Therefore, we could say that there are two anxieties, a good one and a bad one: "anxiety can push people to overcome obstacles, this is a good type of anxiety, but it can also provoke symptoms that inhibit people and keep them for accomplishing their goals" (Montero, 2018, p. 67). In the case of students, this negative anxiety is related to feelings of frustration, insecurity and fear (Morgan, 2000). And we could go deeper and discover that there are more possible classifications of anxiety. Peter D. MacIntyre and Robert C. Gardner (1989) mention *state anxiety*, a transient experience of anxiety as an emotional reaction to the current; *trait anxiety;* and *situation-specific anxiety*, such as during tests, mathematics problems and speaking a second language, which are named "test anxiety", "math anxiety", and "language anxiety" respectively.

Regarding adolescents, they are living a challenging period. This is a transition period from childhood to adulthood with deep intellectual, social, and physical changes (Santos & Vallín, 2018). All these changes have some consequences, being high anxiety a part of them. In this context, the main problem we face in Secondary School is that anxiety seems to be an important disorder in adolescents. In fact, "anxiety disorders are the most prevalent mental health concern facing adolescents today, yet they are largely

undertreated" (Siegel, 2012, p. 1), so adolescents and people working with them must deal with this issue. Furthermore, taking into account that "anxiety disorders are among the most important health issues facing adolescents, and also their parents and those who work with and treat adolescents" (Siegel, 2012, p. 1), this aspect should be in centre of our focus. According to García:

Las edades en que se encuentra el mayor número de estudiantes con síntomas de ansiedad y depresión corresponden a la adolescencia y adultez temprana. Es importante tener en cuenta las peculiaridades y problemáticas evolutivas propias de dichas etapas que podrían actuar como factores de vulnerabilidad (2014, p. 31).

Therefore, we may understand that adolescence is a critical period for mental stability in general. Besides this well-known situation, we add now the high social and academic pressure we are exposed to. Today, students must have more knowledge than three decades ago. For example, in the subject of English as a foreign language, we observe that students have more tests than before. In fact, they must pass the classical tests that were used three decades ago, but the "skills" tests, i.e., tests of reading comprehension, oral comprehension, writing expression, and oral expression, have been added. Furthermore, finishing the Secondary School with a B2 is no longer a huge advantage, but a somewhat normal possibility. Unfortunately, this is not the only source of stress and anxiety, because today's world is very competitive, and adolescents receive that information. In this regard, McCarthy (2019) mentions three important factors that impact adolescents: high expectations and pressure to succeed, a world that feels scary and threatening, and social media. This context leads to adolescents with higher levels of anxiety than in other decades. Teachers should be well aware of this situation and be sensitive when they deal with their students. Taking into consideration that anxiety in general seems to be largely present adolescents, it makes sense to think that this element should be especially addressed by education centers, and teachers should apply techniques to reduce stress and anxiety in their lessons.

In conclusion, anxiety and stress are part of our lives. Nevertheless, if these levels are too high, we may fall in the "bad anxiety". In this regard, we should

pay attention to the anxiety levels in adolescents, who seem to suffer from this "bad anxiety" partially due to an increasingly competitive environment. And as we will mention in the next section, this anxiety may be a significant obstacle in the learning process, and it should not be neglected.

3.2. Anxiety, education, and second language learning

Bearing in mind that anxiety represents an important issue in adolescence, as mentioned above, we may imagine that it has consequences in the foreign language classroom. In general terms, Dr. Ken Schuster, PsyD, (in Ehmke, 2021) says that anxiety tends to lock up the brain and this makes school hard for anxious kids, and this results in problems to acquire concepts due to different mechanisms, including problems to focus on the lesson. Indeed, anxiety may be a source of disruptive behaviour, leading sometimes to a confusion with ADHD. On other occasions, it may result in a shy student who does not want to participate in class and tries to go unnoticed. In both cases, it seems that this may impair the learning. In fact, anxiety is one the factors that influences the outcome of the learning and teaching process of a foreign language (Fadillah, 2009). In line with this, some studies show a correlation between anxiety and poorer learning results (Aida, 1994, Dailey, 2003). For instance, we may mention Aida's study (1994, in Fadillah 2009), where 96 students in 2nd year at the university of Texas were enrolled to observe the relationship between anxiety and learning outcomes. Here, a moderate negative correlation between anxiety and course grade was observed. This means that the higher the anxiety, the more likely to obtain lower marks. Another and more recent example can be found in Daley's research (2003, in Fadillah 2009) with 259 students enrolled courses in the US, and those who dropped out of their classes tended to report statistically significantly higher levels of anxiety. Here, we should not confuse the above mentioned good and bad anxieties. As it was said before, anxiety makes us move, so no anxiety would be harmful for the learning process. The good anxiety is mentioned in the Yerkes-Dodson law, according to which "moderate levels of anxiety may enhance students' performance in active-learning classes, especially if the task is simple or mundane" (Teigen 1994, in Cooper 2018). Nevertheless, if an instructor aims at increasing students' motivation, it is important to consider the level of anxiety

and how this may influence students to carry out the task successfully. This aspect is to be taken into consideration especially when dealing with a cognitively difficult task, where anxiety may be more significant (Kessler et al., 2005, in Cooper 2018).

Second language acquistion is also affected by this issue. Affective factors and anxiety are being increasingly studied in the context of second language acquisition. In fact, Arnol and Brown (2006, in Morgan 2000) mention that second and foreign languages are subjects that cause high levels of anxiety, maybe more than any other one. Moreover, empirical research has demonstrated that language anxiety is associated with deficits in listening comprehension, reduced word production, impaired vocabulary learning, lower grades in language courses, and lower scores on standardized test (Horwitz & Young 1991, in D. MacIntyre and Robert C. Gardner). Remembering the above term of "lock" commented by Dr. Schuster and applied to second language learning, Du (2009, in Montero 2018) says:

Comprehensible input may not be utilized by L2 acquirers if there is a "mental block" that prevents them from fully profiting from it. The affective filter acts as a barrier to acquisition. The filter is up when the acquirer is unmotivated, lacking in confidence, or concerned with failure. The filter is down when the acquirer is not anxious and is trying to become a member of the group speaking. (2018, p. 66).

From the different aforementioned types of anxiety, test anxiety is an important element, as in today learning methodology tests are part of the system. In her research, Fadilla (2010) affirms that there is a significant negative correlation between test anxiety and students' achievement. Moreover, particularly in second language lessons, the aforementioned "language anxiety" plays an important role. According to Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope (1986, in Peter D. MacIntyre y Robert C. Gardner), language anxiety may be described as a complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors that are special of this subject, due to the fact that the process that are part of the second language learning are unique. Indeed, a second language class implies processes, such as speaking, that are more complicated and may cause more embarrassement in comparison to other subjects.

In this context, teachers of a foreign language should pay great attention to reduce anxiety in their lessons. Apparently, this could lead to better language learning outcomes. In this regard, Krashen (2009, in Montero 2018) indicates that low anxiety seems to improve second language acquisition, and this is true for both, personal and classroom anxiety. In fact, Morgan (2000) mentions Elli's model called "teacher confirmation", where teacher's communication, both verbal and non-verbal, is important to make students feel accepted and valued. In this manner, teachers may create an environment with reduced anxiety, leading to students less afraid of taking risks to express themselves in a foreign language. And this environment seems to be particulary important in second language learning, as speaking, and how students speak, is an important part of the subject. Conversations in class are being increasingly used and becoming a key part in the foreign language lessons. Due to the importance of this speaking factor, during these lessons, teachers try to make students speak in class in the foreign language that is being taught. This forces students to speak before their peers and they have the feeling they are being evaluated, both by peers and the teacher, on each occasion they take part in the class. Sometimes, students are literally forced, when teachers use the cold call or the random call systems, i.e, the teacher chooses a student to reply to a concrete question or to give an opinion in class, when these students were not a volunteer (cold call) or when these students are called randomly with a list (random call). These systems may be used to enhance dynamics in class with a positive intention of improving language learning. However, a study showed that students report high levels of anxiety in these contexts, where teacher calls students to speak in class with techniques such as cold call or random call (Cooper, Downing & Brownell, 2018). This study was carried out in science courses, so students spoke in their languages, and even in this context, around 60% of students said that their anxiety increased with this method. In a foreign language class, we should add the difficulty of speaking in another language, which makes the whole process more difficult.

Taking into consideration all this information and the fact that students should speak in the foreign language in order to improve their skills, teachers should apply any techniques that may make the atmosphere more comfortable. Next

section seeks to explain how alternative methods such as music can be an ally for teachers to reduce anxiety in the classroom and improve attention.

3.3. Music, anxiety, and attention

Music has a great presence in our lives, being an integral part of our society and everyday life, and it influences our behaviours, maybe due to its strong emotional power (Saarikallio, 2007). Music has an effect on our bodies and brains and it seems it can be used as a mood regulator. In this regard, in a study the subjects, among different mood regulation strategies, self-rated music as the second better to change a bad mood or raising energy (Thayer et al. 1994 in Saarikallio S., 2017). Taking into account the amount of existing research, this effect seems indeniable (Saarikallio, S., 2007, p. 11). Therefore, music is used in parties and other contexts as an entertainment tool and it is also used in cases of sadness, in order to improve the mood or just to accompany in the *grief* process. In line with this, the University of Nevada says that music may have a profound effect on both the emotions and the body. In this regard, faster rhythms make us feel more alert and help us concentrate better, upbeat music may help us be more optimistic and have a more positive view of life, and a slower rhythm can relax both the brain and the muscles. Therefore, music makes us feel more energetic but also may take away our stress, and this feature makes music an effective tool for relaxation and stress management. In fact, this same University affirms that current findings indicate that music around 60 beats per minute can cause the brain to synchronize with the beat causing alpha brainwaves, and these waves are those present when we are relaxed and conscious. Furthermore, the power of music as a therapy to reduce anxiety is well kown and its use is becoming increasingly important, even in clinical settings. For example, a clinical assay (Belland et al., 2017) has studied how music could reduce anxiety among older adults in the emergency department. In this study, 35 patients were enrolled, with 17 patients in the study and intervention group and 18 in the control group. There were no significant diferences at baseline, but enrolled patients treated with music had a significant lower STAI (state-trait anxiety inventory) 1 hour later in comparison to the control group. In another clinical study, music was used to reduce anxiety in patients before gastrointestinal procedures, such as colonoscopy or

esophagogastroduodenoscopy, as these patients are usually anxious or nervous. In this larger study, 198 patients were enrolled, taking part in the intervention group with music 100 patients and in the control group 98 patients. STAI was also used to measure anxiety and a statistically significant result was observed between those patients who listened to music and those who did not. Patients who listened to self-selected music during 15 minutes had anxiety reduction. Therefore, in this study music has shown to be an instrument that can significantly reduce patients' anxiety prior to gastrointestinal procedures with the advantage of being non-invasive (Hayes et al., 2003). In an educative context, students said in a study that "soft music makes them feel comfortable, focus, and relax" (Dinsmore, 2003, p. 19). Dinsmore (2003) affirms that music is a useful instrument that can help teachers influence their classroom environment, with a positive impact on classroom management.

Furthermore, there is a number of studies that have mentioned a positive impact of music on attention and, moreover, music contains therapeutic factors that enhance attentions skills. In this regard, some example may be mention, such as the capacity of rhythmic patterns to drive attention focus, and the fact that musical elements such as rhythm, melody, and harmony provide may facilitate switching attention (Gardiner, 2005; Thaut & Gardiner, 2014, in Kasuya-Ueba, et al., 2020). One study (Kasuya-Ueba et al., 2020) has been carried out to verify whether music, with a short-term music intervention (a single 30-minute trial), could produce an improvement in terms of attention in 6-9 year-old-children. The results of this study showed a significant improvement in children's attention control. Moreover, music may influence our mood and, because of this, it also may influence the learning process. Regarding this last point, it is worth mentioning the arousal-mood-hypothesis, which says that listening to music affects arousal and mood, and therefore may influence performance on various cognitive skills (Husain et al., 2002, in He, Wong & Hui, 2017). Therefore, music may have a positive influence in class, helping control the emotional context in class. However, not any music seems to be good for the class. Regarding the type of music, only soft fast music had a positive influence, whilst loud fast as well as soft slow or loud slow music hindered learning (Thompson et al. (2011) in Lehmann, & Seufert, 2017). In addition, instrumental music disturbs learners less than music with lyrics (Perham and

Currie, 2014, in Lehmann & Seufert, 2017). In line with this, some studies do not recommend the use of background music based on their results. For example, Lehmann, & Seufert (2017) declared that it was a personal decision to use music in an attempt to raise their motivation levels and Chou (2010) found background music as a source of distraction. In spite of these discouraging studies, other authors like (Kasuya-Ueba, Zhao & Toichi, 2020) still insist on the benefits of music, as the use of music is a good tool to enhance the development in children with special needs, particularly when this music approach is carried out in a systematic way. For example, the results of White, K. N. (2007) suggest background music has proven to be an effective tool. This research is interesting, as the subjects of study were students with negative behaviour and lack of motivation. And in this context, the author considered the implementation of music a very useful option and it is affirmed that the classroom teacher was very satisfied with students' performance. Therefore, it exists the possibility that music has a positive influence in students with a particularly complicated behaviour in class, opening thus a new window of possibilities with those students. Furthermore, music may also be helpful with students suffering from ADHD. For these people, focusing their attention on one topic for some time, as required in the classroom, may be a huge challenge. A study has been carried out with ADHD students and according to Frantz (2020) music is a powerful tool to help students with ADHD overcome the challenges they face in the classroom, and, unfortunately, there are many teachers who do not know these benefits and they should consider the use of music in the classroom as a class management technique.

Taking into consideration all this information, it seems that music could be helpful as a tool to class management and improve attention in regular classes and also in those with students with special needs.

3.4. Creative writing, anxiety, and attention

Creative Writing does not appear in EFL textbooks. These books normally deal instead with every day life activities or "real" contexts in order to foster motivation, as students may see this material as useful. Nevertheless, Creative Writing may also be a strong tool in class. Creative Writing is rarely included in the curriculum, although it is included as a skill in the CEFR (Common

European Framework of Reference). This reality means that we may be losing a great opportunity to engage students, as literature is related to pleasure. When it comes to giving advice on something to read or when teenagers freely read something, this is always creative literature (including manga) (Smith, 2013). Reading and writing stories may be engaging and, thus, enhance motivation and attention, two key elements for education success and students of special programmes, such as PMAR, may have a lack of one or both of them. Writing stories may encourage students to write more and enjoy while studying the foreign language. Taking into account how frustrating studying a foreign language may be, it is interesting the effect that Creative Writing may have, creating positive feelings, as students may express more freely and this reinforces a feeling of independence and motivation (Efverlund & Wachtmeister, 2021). Therefore, it seems that this motivating factor may be used in the EFL classes to lower anxiety and improve motivation and attention. Furthermore, Creative Writing may be beneficial for students, because it helps them develop creative attitude towards life and the capacity to effectively deal with challenges that appear both in their daily and professional lives (Forgeard, Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009). Nevertheless, apart from these benefits in terms of motivation, attention, and even personal development, there are also linguistic improvements related to the Creative Writing. This technique may improve vocabulary and grammar, and it requires the student to work with the language in a different way, trying to express personal and unique feelings and ideas, and it makes work the right side of the brain. In this manner, with Creative Writing we may work with students' emotional side, which is sometimes neglected. Creative Writing makes students play with the language and ensures a language development at all levels (Avramenko, Davydova & Burikova, 2018).

Taking into consideration what we have mentioned above, using Creative Writing may improve writing skills in general and academic success, due to the aforementioned features, and these improvements lead to increasing self-esteem (Senel, 2018). Because of all these characteristics, it seems that Creative Writing activities should be implemented in the EFL lessons.

4. PMAR PROGRAMME

The current Spanish education law has created a specific programme for those students with significant difficulties in the ordinary classes: Programmes of Learning and Performance Improvement (PMAR, *Programa de mejora del aprendizaje y del rendimiento*). This programme consists of two years that correspond to the second and third years of the compulsory secondary education. To be accepted in this special programme, students must have repeated one course and they will enter this programme only with their parents/guardians' approval. Therefore, we are dealing with students that have "failed" in the ordinary system and need other kind of attention and an adapted curriculum. According to González Carballo (1997), these students have a low academic profile, which are related to low linguistic and numeric competences and difficulties in other areas, such as the capacity of abstraction or logical reasoning. These characteristics together with a general lack of interest in the teaching and learning process lead to frequent academic failures. Furthermore, some groups in PMAR have several students with special education needs, such as Attention-Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and students with Disruptive Behavioural Disorders (DBD). These students are included in the *Ley Orgánica para la Mejora de la Calidad Educativa* (*LOMCE*), of 2013 as candidates for PMAR groups. Adolescents with ADHD may have problems paying attention or controlling impulsive behaviours, and they may overly active. Regarding students with a kind of DBD, they may show symptoms as lack of respect, aggressivity towards other people and animals, willfully destroy property, be uncooperative, argue about small and unimportant things, refuse to follow orders, deliberately annoy others, blame others for their mistakes or misbehaviour, etc. (Nation Wide Children's Hospital website). Students with these symptoms in class may make teacher's job difficult. Other students only have problems understanding the contents, but they may show a good behaviour in class. Besides these characteristics, these students are often demotivated, as aforementioned, due to their bad results at school, after years of not achieving the expected results. When teachers enter a class of PMAR, they find this mixture of students and characteristics.

5. OBJECTIVES

Students need to feel comfortable in class to focus on the task. Therefore, creating a good environment is critical to enhance learning. In fact, it should noted that in a study (Dinsmore, 2003), 81% of students considered that classroom environemnt influences how well they stay on-task. There are several elements that influence the class environment, such as teachers' way of communicating (verbal and non-verbal), a good organization, or good realtionships between students. Another aspect that should be taken into account is the use of music in the classroom, because "music is one way in which teachers can influence their classroom environment to have a positive impact on classroom management" (Dinsmore, 2003, p. 17). And according to the previously mentioned and recent studies, this may be true even in the groups with the most challenging behaviours (Frantz, 2020). Moreover, we have also seen that Creative Writing may entail improvements in the learning process, with significant ones in terms of motivation, concentration, and even in other important aspects such as self-esteem and personal development. And all these benefits come together with a language development at all levels (Avramenko et al. 2018).

Bearing this in mind, this innovation proposal aims to:

- Use soft music to improve classroom environment, reduce anxiety and enhance students' willingness to carry out the tasks in a PMAR group.
- Combine music and creative writing activities to create a relaxed environment during the last lesson of the week.
- Use creative writing as a tool to improve PMAR students' perceptions towards writing tasks and to enhance their writing skills.
- Improve motivation and attention, key elements in the learning process, through a better environment in class.

6. PEDAGOGICAL INTERVENTION

6.1. Context

This methodology will be applied in a Secondary Centre in Calahorra, La Rioja. This city has 24,000 inhabitants and is a reference in the South of La Rioja and Navarra. Its population grew in between 2000 and 2010 mainly due to the immigration, being Morocco the country with the largest representation. However, there are other important communities in the city, especially those from Romania, Colombia, Ecuador, and Bolivia.

Its main economic activity is the commercial one, but it also has some important companies of different industries, such as food, shoe and cardboard companies. Furthermore, there are important companies in nearby villages and those workers choose Calahorra as town to live in, due to its services. In general terms, the unemployment rate is approx. 10 %, much lower than the country's average, which is 15 %.

Students' population is a representation of the aforementioned data of Calahorra, with some students coming from nearby villages and having approx. 20 % of immigrant families.

6.2. Target group

This methodology aims to be applied in a group of PMAR, 1st year. This decision is based on the fact that these groups are particularly challenging for teachers, due to their lack of motivation and interest. These students have already failed in the system and they deserve an opportunity with alternative methodologies that could help them improve their results.

In this case, this is a group of 14 students who are 14-15 years old. The group has 10 boys and 4 girls and 7 students with foreign origin, in particular from Morocco (5), Algeria (1), and Ecuador (1). Three of the students have a diagnosis of Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and one a diagnosis of Attention-Deficit Disorder (ADD) without hyperactivity. As mentioned before, these students have already suffered failures in the regular system and are somewhat demotivated. They show difficulty to stay on focus

and they have a class on Friday at last hour, a lesson that is particularly challenging.

6.3. Methodology

In this innovation proposal, music and creative writing will be used in a group of PMAR (Programa de Mejora del Aprendizaje y del Rendimiento), consisting of a group of 14 adolescents, for lessons that take place the last hour on Friday. These groups are usually challenging due to their lack of motivation and difficulties to stay on task, and the last lesson of the week is the most challenging. Therefore, music and creative writing will be applied in a attempt to improve their motivation and concentration. As mentioned above, some studies have mentioned that music could lead to distraction and, as a result, offer the contrary effect to the one desired. Therefore, music should be chosen with care. On the one hand, relaxing no voice music seems to be ideal as a background music to foster concentration. On the other hand, let students choose the background music they would like to listen to may be a means of improving their motivation and making them feel valued by the teacher. And this last aspect is quite important in students with failures in the system, so listening to them and taking into consideration their opinions may contribute to creating a better environment. Bearing these aspects in mind, students will provide a playlist to the teacher and they will choose together, with teacher's direction, those songs that seem more convenient to play in class. Remembering the already mentioned studies, music with less lyrics and a medium tempo will be preferred. Most of the days, relaxing music with no lyrics will be used, as studies seem favorable to this idea:

> The researcher found that by implementing classical background music in the classroom it is strongly linked to increased motivation to learn, the ability to stay on-task, and the production of positive behaviors. The classroom environment was completely different; the music created an inviting, calm, and comfortable atmosphere that promoted the motivation to learn and stay on-task (White, 2007, p. 18).

During teacher's explanation no music will be played. Music will only be applied in moments when students must carry out tasks and activities.

Regarding the creative writing, as it was mentioned above, creativity activities may improve motivation and even academic success, what may result in an improvement of students' self-esteem. Something important in special programmes, such as PMAR. Therefore, students will be performing creative writing activities as a means of improving their motivation and attention. In this regard, it should no be forgotten that these groups need dynamic lessons, otherwise they may lose focus. Therefore, activities will last 10-15 minutes. If activities are longer, they will be divided into subactivities of this duration. There must be more or less quick changes to keep these students focused.

6.4. Key competences

In this methodology, students will be working the following competences:

1 - Linguistic competence (C1). Students will be working with a foreign language as a means of communication and production.

2 - Learning to learn competence (C2). There is no perfect method, it depends on each person. Students will try new methods of learning, they may realise that listening to music works for them, they will try creative activities, and they will be invited to reflect on these methods comparing them to other methods they may have tried.

3 - Social and Civic Comptence (C3). This methodology of music with creatice activities may help them reduce anxiety and create new things alone and in cooperation with others. Finally, this may improve the environment in class and show them that everythign flows better working with others.

4 – Sense of Initiative and entrepreneurship (C4). Students will be training their creativity a critical part of this competence and they will have the opportuniry to make proposals of what music to work with in certain sessions.

5 - Cultural Awareness and Expression (C5). Students will be using music and literature in class and understand the value these elements have, not only as an entertainment, but also as a useful tool to learn. Moreover, they will be listening to Japanese music, so they will exposed to other kinds of music they do not listen to.

6.5. General and specific objectives

PMAR is part of the Compulsory Secondary School and, as such, it has the same objectives as ESO. From the different objectives stated in the law for these years, we will be focusing on the following ones in this Project:

- Develop and consolidate habits of discipline, study and individual and team work as a necessary condition for the efficient performance of learning tasks and as a means of personal development. (G1)
- Value and respect the difference between the sexes and the equality of rights and opportunities between them. Reject stereotypes that discriminate between men and women. (G2)
- Develop an entrepreneurial spirit and self-confidence, participation, critical sense, personal initiative and the ability to learn to learn, plan, make decisions and assume responsibilities. (G3)
- Understand and express themselves in one or more foreign languages in an appropriate manner. (G4)
- Appreciate artistic creation and understand the language of the different artistic manifestations, using different means of expression and representation. (G5)

About the specific objectives of this methodology, we may mention the following:

- Learn methods to be more relaxed and focus. Something important for every student, but particularly important in special groups as PMAR. (S1)
- Present new types of music, which may present other cultures and convey new feelings, and different from the music adolescents are usually exposed to. In this regard, adolescents usually listen exciting music, instead of relaxing options that may help them improve their attention. (S2)
- Understand there are other options and ways to study. (S3)
- Learn vocabulary related topersonal identification, daily living, work, home, family, and friends. (S4)
- Learn vocabulary related to climate and natural environment. (S5)
- Learn vocabulary related to free time, leisure, travel, vacations, food and restaurants. (S6)

- Learn vocabulary related to sports, health and physical care. (S7)
- Learn vocabulary related to information and communication technologies. (S8)
- Use the present simple and continuous. (S9)
- Use the past simple and continuous. (S10)
- Use structures of existence (there is/are). (S11)
- Use time expressions (when, afterwards, before, some time ago, right now). (S12)
- Use structures of opinion, knowledge and ignorance (I think/believe, I do not know why). (S13)
- Use different connectors (because, due to, however). (S14)

6.6. Contents

In this Project, we will be working on the contents of "Block II. Written Communication", in particular with those related to the written production. Therefore, the contents are (Decreto 19/2015, de 28 de enero):

- Planning: mobilizing and coordinating one's general and communicative skills in order to perform the task effectively; locating and making appropriate use of linguistic or thematic resources (use of a dictionary or grammar, obtaining help, etc.). (1)
- Execution: expressing the message clearly by adjusting to the models and formulas of each type of text; readjusting the task, after assessing the difficulties and resources available and making the most of previous knowledge. (2)
- Expression of opinion, knowledge, and ignorance. (3)
- Expression of intent, command, permission and prohibition. (4)
- Expression of taste, preference, interest and surprise, and their opposites. (5)
- Formulation of suggestions and wishes. (6)

Apart from these contents, we have those related to vocabulary and syntactic structures:

- Vocabulary: commonly used vocabulary related to personal identification; housing, home and environment; activities of daily living; family and

friends; work and occupations; free time, leisure and sports; travel and vacations; health and physical care; education and study; shopping and commercial activities; food and restaurants; climate and natural environment; and information and communication technologies.

- Expression of cause (*due to, because [of]*), purpose (*in order to, to*), present and past simple and continuous, future, negation (*nobody, nothing*), existence (*there is/are, there will be*), and expression of the mode, and temporal expressions (*afterwards, later, before, already, not yet, next, last*).

6.7. Sessions

6.7.1. Session 1

Session 1	Description
What happens behind the walls?	Students will watch an image and there will be three different types of background music with no voice. The material is a video in YouTube, in https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nHeuZ8EIbSU (Annex I). Students are asked to create the story of the village we can see on the screen. This will be presented like a game, where they have to create a story taking into account the feelings music conveys.
Time: 30 minutes	As mentioned before, there will be three different types of background music, with different rhythms. Each track lasts 2:40 and it will repeated once, so that students have time to think. Afterwards, students will be given 5 minutes to finish their writings in silence and using dictionaries or making questions to the teacher to solve doubts. The first track will the be the one that begins with the video and has a quicker rhythm than the two other tracks that will be used. In minute 2:50 the second track begins and has a complete different, more slowly. The third track will be the one that begins in minute 16. Each background music may create different feelings in students related to the image and to the story that may happen.
Contents: 1, 2, 3, 6	
G. Objectives: G4, G5	
S. Objectives: S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S9, S11, S13, S14	
Competences: C1, C2, C5	They will be invited to think about what they wish it could happen in the end of their story. Vocabulary about daily living, work, familiy, and climate and natural environment will be used. Structures of cause, purpose, existence, temporal, and mode will be used. Materials: YouTube video with relaxing music, students are allowed to use dictionaries, including digital ones on their mobile phones.

6.7.2. Session 2

Session 2	Description
Manga Story	Students are given one page of a Manga to complete the dialogues and the story. Students will have Japanese music in the background. We may take advantage of these classes to present them other cultures and to make them listen other sounds, so different from those they are used to. This may create an impact in them. In particular, track number 3 of https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6a-FnIqM0rI will be important (Annex II).
Time: 20 minutes	This activity will be divided in three parts. We should remember that these students have difficulties in focusing on task if this lasts too much. First, they will figure out what is happening in the image, their general impression. They will write a line or two outlining the situation, giving their opinion. They will have 4 minutes for this.
Contents: 1, 2, 3, 4, 6	
G. Objectives: G2, G4, G5	The second part is the one with the music, using the track mentioned above. Here, they will try to complete the dialogues. The track lasts 4 minutes and students will be given 6 minutes to complete the task. Therefore, the track will be played once and a half.
S. Objectives: S1, S2, S3, S4, S8, S9, S11, S12, S13, S14	Afterwards, the rest of the tracks will be played while students are asked to carry out the thir part of the activity. They will finish the story and the desired end. They will be given 10 minutes to complete this part.
Competences: C1, C2, C3, C5	Present continuous and present simple will be worked on in this activity. Vocabulary related to daily life will be used, mainly family and friends and work related vocabulary.

	Structures of existence, mode and purpose will be used.
	Materials: YouTube video with Japanese relaxing music, Manga image, and students are allowed to use dictionaries, including digital ones on their mobile phones.

6.7.3. Session 3

Session 3	Description
Feelings	In this activity, students will be asked to present a proposal of music that creates special feelings in them. The goal here is to foster entrepreneural competence, they should have the initiative and show that they can propose something appropriate for this context. Moreover, students' opinion will be taken into consideration and this may make them feel better.
Time: 20 minutes	
Contents: 1, 2, 3, 5, 6	In class, students, with the teacher's direction, will choose three songs and they will write how they feel while listening to that music. They will be invited
G. Objectives: G1, G3, G4, G5	to try to write in a poem format, where rhyme is not important, of course, as this would lead to some difficulties. They will be invited to say why this music
S. Objectives: S1, S2, S3, S4, S6, S7, S8, S9, S10, S12, S14	makes them feel like this (because, due to). And the past tense will be worked beginning with "This song helped me/made me feel…, when…". Present simple tenses are also possible.
	Songs will last around 4 minutes each, and a couple of extra minutes will be
Competences: C1, C2, C4	provided to finish the activity, making questions and using dictionaries. Vocabulary to personal identification may be used. The past tense will be used.
	Materials: YouTube to play the songs chosen by the students, and students are allowed to use dictionaries, including digital ones on their mobile phones.

6.7.4. Session 4

Session 4	Description
14 stories	In this activity, students will create stories together but in a different way. The teacher writes on the blackboard the sentence "I went out to visit my frien
Time: 35 minutes	Daniel and…". Students are instructed to finish that sentence and give the paper to their colleagues in front of them or on the right (depending on their positions in class). Now, everyone has a sentence with the beginning of the
Contents: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5	story and they write the second sentence. The process is repeated until every student has written 14 sentences. They will have 2 minutes to write each sentence. In the background, the music of

G. Objectives: G2, G4	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8_yLL1GK28U is played and the image of the video is a boy sitting on a roof (Annex III). What stories will they write?
S. Objectives: S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6, S7, S8, S9, S10, S12, S14	The same or 14 different stories? They will be colaborating in a certain way to achieve a result. This will be engaging and dynamic activity, and there will be the interest of discovering what stories they have written. With this context they may use any vocabulary included in the contents:
Competences: C1, C2, C4	housing, home and environment; activities of daily living; family and friends; work and occupations; free time, leisure and sports; travel and vacations; health and physical care; education and study; shopping and commercial activities; food and restaurants; climate and natural environment; and information and communication technologies. Students will be using present and past simple and continuous, structures of time expression, mode, negation, and existence. Materials: YouTube video with relaxing music, students are allowed to use dictionaries, including digital ones on their mobile phones.

6.8. Feedback and assessment

Taking into consideration that we are working with a demanding group of students, who have already suffered several failures in their academic lives and whose self-esteem may be undermined, we may not neglect the way teachers provide feedback and assess these students.

Regarding the feedback, teachers should be well aware of the fact that teenagers are easily embarrassed, especially when they are put on the spot due to a mistake. Therefore, a negative affective feedback should be avoided. More than in any other group, PMAR teachers should focus on using positive affective and cognitive feedback. With regards to the specific types of feedback, any technique may be useful when used in a positive way, but taking into account the level of the group, some explicit corrections, recasts (also repetition + recast), and metalinguistic feedback may be preferred. Using clarification and elicitation may be frustrating for these students if they are not able to come up with the solution.

The assessment option for these activities is partially sumative, as only good marks will be taken into consideration.

Students will receive their writing activities corrected by the teacher, so they know what they are doing well and not so well. Taking into account that this

activity takes place the last hour on Friday, teachers will take the written productions to correct them and provide students with that assessment on Monday. As in this methodology we are trying to reduce anxiety and stress and foster motivation in a positive way, this result will not be used for the final mark if it is negative, but it will be taken into account if it is positive. In this manner, students may be motivated to do a good writing, but without feeling stress due to the fear of being "punished" if they do not succeed.

The following assessment criteria from the law will be used:

- Carry out the functions demanded by the communicative purpose, using the most common exponents of these functions and the most frequently used discourse patterns to organize the written text in a simple manner with sufficient internal cohesion and coherence with respect to the communication context.

- Show control over a limited repertoire of commonly used syntactic structures, and use to communicate simple mechanisms sufficiently adjusted to the context and communicative intention (lexical repetition, ellipsis, personal, spatial and temporal deixis, juxtaposition, and frequent connectors and discourse markers).

- Know and use a written lexical repertoire sufficient to communicate brief, simple and direct information, opinions and points of view in common, everyday situations, although in less common situations and on less familiar topics the message must be adapted.

Rubric:

Attribute	1-Not acceptable	2-Below expectations	3-Meets expectations	4-Exceeds expectations	Score
Organization	The writing does not follow a logical order, and it is not understandable	The ideas are not in a correct order, and this makes the text difficult to follow	Correct and logical structure, with correct use of paragraphs	Clear structure with a perfect order of ideas	
Vocabulary	There are many mistakes of vocabulary,	There are some mistakes with	Some mistakes, but in general we	Good command of the	

	which make the text difficult to understand	vocabulary	see a correct vocabulary	vocabulary	
Grammar and connectors	The writing contains many mistakes related to grammar and connectors, so it is clear that the student does not know the grammar and he/she does not know the connectors or how to use them	The writing contains several grammar mistakes and the student does not know connectors or how to use them	The writing may contain some mistakes, but grammar is generally well and some connectors correctly are used	Grammar is correct and there is a good command of connectors	
Spelling and punctuation	The writing contains many spelling mistakes, student does not know to write most of the words. Punctuation is poorly used	The writing contains several spelling mistakes, student does not know to write many words. Punctuation shows important problems	There are some spelling mistakes, but the student shows he/she can write in English. Punctuation is generally well used	There are no spelling mistakes, every word is written correctly. PUnctuation is correctly used	
Creativity	The student has made no effort to create something original. The writing is very poor	The student has made little effort to create something original and the writing is poor with very simple	The student has some parts of creativity and made efforts to create a good writing	The writing is complete, with details and a story that show that the student made an effort to write a rich	

		sentences		and original text	

With this rubric, students will obtain a mark out of 20, which may be easily converted into a final mark out of 10. Students with 5-6.99 shall have +0.2 in the final mark of the subject. Students with 7-8.99 shall obtain +0.3 in the final mark. And students with 9 or more shall add +0.4 in the final mark. This aims to help them pass the subject and feel motivated. Considering that there are four writing activities, a student could obtain +1.6 points thanks to these activities. The fact of adding punctuation to the spelling part of the rubric aims to help students obtain a good mark, as it may be easy to use punctuation correctly, taking into consideration that at this level only points at the end of the sentence and some commas are required. In general, we should be flexible with this group. It is better to be more tolerant in the first writings and increase the difficulty in obtaining high marks in the last writings. By acting like this, we may foster motivation with better results in the beginning and encourage students to improve for the last activities.

6.9. Expected Results

This methodology seems feasible in Secondary School classes. Teacher would need an Internet connection, a laptop, and speakers. In this regard, the COVID crisis has powered the implementation of new technologies, so nowadays a good Internet connection is present in every centre and teachers are used to working with a laptop in class. The only limitation to implement this method is the possibility that the idea of using music in a class could not be well received by the centre management. Once implemented, this methodology is thought to create a pleasant environment with less anxiety for both, teachers and students. With this methodology, thanks to the soft music and non-punitive assessment, we may expect to reduce the levels of fear and tension that cause the negative anxiety according to Morgan (2000). In this context with less stress and anxiety, students could work better and improve their learning outcomes. In this regard, we should remember that Dinsmore (2003) has mentioned that soft music helps students "feel comfortable, focus and relax". And this is true even for the most complicated students. In this regard, Frantz (2020) said that music

helps even those students with ADHD. Moreover, thanks to the creative writing, we may expect more motivation, as literature, according to Smith (2013), is related to pleasure and reading creative literature is the general advice when we want to encourage teenagers to read. Taking into consideration, the aforementioned aspects, improvements in grammar, vocabulary and writing skills are to be expected. Nevertheless, there are also studies that mention the possibility of background music as a source of distraction (Chou, 2010), therefore, the teacher should pay attention to a potential loss of attention in certain students. In general, the expected results are a better environment where the teacher should have less problems to keep the control of the group and students should be more concentrated and relaxed. These elements altogether should lead to a better language learning process.

7. CONCLUSION

This project has proposed a methodology based on music and creative writing to reduce anxiety and improve motivation in the EFL class in a group of PMAR. Anxiety and lack of motivation are two relevant aspects that may hinder the learning process in Secondary School, and particularly in the EFL subject. These elements are especially present in PMAR students, who have suffered different failures in their academic lives, and they represent a quite vulnerable population in general terms. These students have problems to stay on focus, some even with ADHD diagnosis, and are not motivated to study. The use of music, particularly with no lyrics, has shown to be a useful tool to improve motivation and reduce anxiety. Moreover, creative writing is recommended as a tool to foster motivation and concentration, and it may develop important skills for students' life, including self-esteem and self-confidence. Furthermore, creative writing activities have also shown a great potential to improve language skills. Bearing this in mind, it seems that mixing both elements, music and creative writing, we may create a positive environment in class, where students feel comfortable, relaxed and concentrated.

This methodology has other important elements, as providing feedback in a positive and respectful way, which may help students see their mistakes without feeling embarrassed. Another aspect is the assessment, where negative marks shall not be taken into account, eliminating the stress factor of a failing mark. In this methodology, failing marks shall be used to help students realise where they have problems, but without punishing them (formative assessment). Only good marks will be taken into account, because this may motivate them to do a good activity.

In conclusion, this methodology may help teachers deal with the lessons that take place during the last hour of Friday in PMAR groups. Music and creative writing may reduce students desire to go out and help them stay focus. These students have suffered and have many difficulties, so every tool should be used to help them find their place in the system.

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